

Minnesota Patient Safety Alert

Feb. 27, 2006

Patient Protection: suicide by hanging

MDH has reviewed data from the patient safety registry and has noted suicide by hanging via door hardware. A review of these events shows two common root causes:

1. environment and equipment;
2. staff training and education of suicide assessments and precautions.

Background

Nationally, inpatient suicide by hanging mostly occur in bathrooms, bedrooms, or closets and have occurred in psychiatric facilities, acute care hospitals, residential care facilities, and in emergency rooms. A large percentage of all hanging suicides are not fully suspended, meaning the ligature points (beams, hooks, banisters) are below head level.

Recommendation

Environment and equipment

The National Association of Psychiatric Health System provides very detailed technical environmental guidelines for behavioral health facilities that include hardware (hinges, closers, arm pulls, knobs and levers).

Staff training and education of suicide assessments and precautions

The Joint Commission International Center for Patient Safety lists strategies for improving patient suicide risk assessments and staff education, and are highlighted below:

- Use a standardized suicide risk assessment/reassessment procedure
- Implement education for family/ friends regarding suicide risk factors
- Enhance staff orientation/education regarding suicide risk factors

MDH recommends that all facilities, especially those with behavioral health units, review their environmental and patient safety policies regarding patient suicide prevention, assess the knowledge of relevant staff of suicide risk factors, and review suicide risk assessment /reassessment procedures.

Suggested resources:

The National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems' Guidelines for The Built Environment of Behavioral Health Facilities include detailed information on safe hardware and the installation of hardware.
<http://www.naphs.org/Teleconference/safetystandards.html>

Inpatient Suicides: Recommendations for Prevention. The Joint Commission International Center for Patient Safety 7 http://www.jcaho.org/about+us/news+letters/sentinel+event+alert/sea_27.htm

The epidemiology and prevention of suicide by hanging: a systematic review. (abstract)
<http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/34/2/433>